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THE ASSESSMENT OF JUNIOR COLLEGE ENVIRONMENTS

The need to know more about institutions of higher education – more than is found in the college catalog – has become evident. Research of a socio-psychological nature aimed at answering the basic question "What is the campus really like?" first appeared in the mid-1950's with the work of C. Robert Pace and George Stern. The description of college environments has since developed to the point where highly sophisticated measurement instruments now exist, and studies dealing with this topic are becoming more abundant. Research of this nature is an excellent form of institutional self-study, producing information valuable for use in planning. Where change is deemed desirable, this information provides the guidelines and charts the directions.

Researchers of campus environments have, for the most part, neglected the junior college. This issue of the Research Review examines the seven research reports, received and processed by the ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior College Information, that devote major attention to the study of junior college environments.

REVIEW

The environment of junior colleges may be viewed from a number of perspectives, some of which are (1) resources (scholarly or financial), (2) curricular offerings, (3) control, (4) size, (5) clientele, (6) faculty-student ratio, (7) student cultures. A unique approach to the study of campus environments incorporates the concept of the "effective campus environment." This is the environment that is perceived by the students and organized into their consciousness with some degree of unanimity of impression, to the exclusion of what is printed in the college catalog, written into objectives, or claimed by faculty and administrators. This concept has been applied in the development of the College and University Environment Scales (CUES), which have been used quite extensively in four-year institutions. A specific study employing the test model of CUES – Junior College Edition (ED 018 204) investigated student and faculty perceptions of the Los Angeles City College environment from both a preferential and an existential viewpoint. The environment was measured along the following four major dimensions, which, through factor analysis, were found to best characterize institutional patterns of public community junior colleges;

Conventional Conformity: describes the college as a community in which persons actively participate in many ways and to varying degrees. Conformity to group mores is evident. The general picture is friendly, socially desirable group participation.

Internalization: indicates an awareness of social, cultural, political, artistic, and philosophical issues and problems. The emphasis is on understanding, rather than solving, the issues and problems, and on adjusting to their presence as a matter of controlling one's own welfare.

Maturation: is concerned primarily with what might be called growth, maturity, responsibility, etc.; it describes a college that definitely serves the function of developing self-direction in its students.

Humanism: describes a student body with interests in discussing and sharing ideas and theories of philosophy, politics, theology, etc. outside the classroom setting. It connotes student cohesiveness with respect to academic interests with correspondingly little attention to social interests.

This in-depth study of institutional dynamics justified the following generalizations regarding the L.A.C.C. environment:

1) L.A.C.C. students describe their college as one where students are expected to do many things for themselves, where more emphasis is placed by both students and faculty on world affairs and cultures than on campus activities, where the instructors are competent and businesslike, although sometimes difficult to approach, and where considerable learning takes place outside the regular classroom program.

2) In describing a college environment they would like to be a part of, L.A.C.C. students portray an "Ideal" college not considerably unlike their perceptions of L.A.C.C.

3) L.A.C.C. faculty, in describing their preferences for a college environment, place stress on competence of instructors, strong guidance and job placement programs, adequate facilities (especially library and laboratory), an atmosphere to stimulate intellectual and cultural activities, and a responsible, mature student body.

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The results of preliminary studies using the above-mentioned Junior College Edition of CUES were summarized by Pace (ED 014 972). The findings: (1) the item content of CUES is appropriate for junior colleges; (2) the scores obtained by junior colleges are about what one would expect in comparison with liberal arts colleges and universities; (3) the differences among junior colleges are not nearly as large as among universities or among liberal arts colleges; (4) this relatively greater homogeneity may be a valid judgment about junior colleges in general or it may be peculiar to the Minnesota, Texas, and California schools studies; and (5) while many of the present CUES items do not discriminate well between different junior colleges, one cannot say whether this is a fault of the test items or an accurate reflection of junior college environments.

The American College Testing Program has taken steps toward the development of a different kind of junior college environment assessment instrument, which organizes readily available and easily quantifiable information on two-year colleges into a profile characterizing individual institutions (ED 013 599). Factor analysis of 36 commonly agreed-upon junior college characteristics yielded six loadings:

Cultural Affluence: describes a college with a large number of library books per student, relatively many foreign and out-of-state students, and many faculty members in relation to the number of students. It is privately or religiously controlled, and is relatively well financed. The factor appears to involve facilities, such as the library and the faculty, more than financial wealth.

Technological Specialization: describes a college with a technological emphasis, with many students in technical programs, with many male students, with few students studying such fields as education and secretarial work, and with few out-of-state students. It is a public school that does not emphasize the liberal arts.

Size: describes colleges with large enrollments, large libraries, a heterogeneous curriculum, many part-time students, and a placement service. The college scoring high would probably be an urban-centered, open-door comprehensive college, with a strong emphasis on continuing education. In addition, one might expect an impersonal atmosphere, few personal contacts between students and faculty, several highly organized student subcultures, and a relatively clear status hierarchy of social groups.

Age: represents an old college, with faculty and students who are both full-time, with few working students but relatively many out-of-state students. It has *not* grown, it spends a good deal of money per student, and is a private school. The high-scoring college would probably resemble a small, four-year, liberal arts college. It would likely have many traditions, a resident student body, and an administration that saw its role as acting *in loco parentis*. It would also have a selective admissions policy, although not necessarily one that emphasized academic aptitude.

Transfer Emphasis: emphasizes teacher training, liberal arts, and a heterogeneous environment. Colleges scoring high have many students studying such fields as education, many graduates who go on to four-year colleges, and many faculty members with master's degrees. A common denominator of most of these variables is a requirement for further education beyond junior college and, accordingly, many graduates of high-scoring colleges seek advanced training.

Business Orientation: is characterized by many bright and enterprising students, many faculty Ph.D.'s, high tuition, and high per-capita expenditures.

This instrument makes it possible to describe and compare junior colleges in terms of the factor scores. However, it is doubtful that much of a relationship would exist between the profiles derived therefrom and those obtained by using CUES-Junior College Edition.

Another ACT study (ED 013 082) correlated six environmental factors with junior college student body characteristics (test scores, high school grades, special interests, campus needs, and nonclassroom accomplishments). Environmental factors and student characteristics co-varied in interesting and meaningful ways, but most of the correlations were moderate to low. Environmental factor scores in general were found not to be a satisfactory substitute for a detailed description of the student body of a junior college.

Using former junior college students along with a group of students with no junior college experience, a small-scale inquiry (ED 015 742) was taken to compare perceptions of the junior college environment. Ten facets of junior college environments were measured on bi-polar adjectival scales. Differences in perceptions by the two groups of respondents were evident on half of the scales. Of greater importance, however, was the finding that former two-year college students showed great variance in their perceptions of "the Junior College environment." The authors observed that this might be due to great differences among the 13 junior colleges on which the respondents were reporting.

A conscious effort to inform the populace about the philosophy, purposes, and environmental characteristics of the junior college is the way to show a new image, more in line with its true characteristics. To this end, Epperson, in a recent article in the *Journal of the Association of College Admissions Counselors* (ED 016 450), makes a plea to those charged with counseling prospective students to convey a realistic image of the two-year college. He cites five major problems faced by developing junior colleges that carry significant consequences for students: (1) limited space and equipment; (2) the non-existence of a viable educational community and serious program deficiencies; (3) general unavailability of trained faculty and administrators; (4) difficulties encountered by students transferring to a four-year institution; and (5) the image of junior colleges as second-class institutions, creating prestige prob-

lems for its students. If students are allowed to choose after giving full consideration to strengths and weaknesses of all facets of our diverse system of higher education, those electing the junior college are more likely to hold realistic expectations for their education.

In *Creating the College Climate* (ED 013 625), Stephens College Vice-President James Rice discusses the factors that together produce the ethos called the environment of the institution. The physical make-up of the campus — buildings, their architecture and arrangement — is an important determiner of the campus environment. The plant does not itself cause learning; if, however, architecture and campus organization are not consistent with the objectives of the college their impact can mitigate other aspects of the educational environment.

The author suggests several questions to test the attractiveness of the campus environment: When do students come to the campus and when do they go? What do they do when they are not in classes? Where do students congregate? Where do they go to be alone? Are there places where they can escape to be by themselves outside or to study inside? How is the library used? What are the places on campus that have been given names frequently mentioned in student conversations?

An attractive environment will do much toward keeping students and faculty on campus. This in turn contributes to the "sense of community" so important to an effective learning environment.

Students, faculty, and administrators are the personal element in the college environment. The interaction of persons within the physical setting of the campus creates the distinctive environment of the institution. The kind and quality of the elements and their interaction determine the prevailing atmosphere.

SUMMARY

The assessment of junior college environments has taken two forms: assessment based upon empirically derived data, and assessment based upon philosophic discourse. Both approaches have their place in the literature. However, more stress must be placed upon research findings. With this in mind, researchers are developing new sophisticated instrumentation. A special, revised edition of Junior College CUES is being written which, it is hoped, will better discriminate among junior college environment. This will assist in determining the relative effectiveness of various two-year colleges in attaining their stated objectives.

Research-based planning and decision-making must replace the intuitive approach to administration if the community junior college is to attain the viability required of today's institutions of higher education. However, effective planning and decision-making cannot occur in a vacuum; appropriate data must be at hand. Research-derived information on the dimensions of the junior college environment is now available to facilitate the administrative processes.

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